

HEIDEGGER'S ANALYTIC

Interpretation, Discourse, and Authenticity
in *Being and Time*

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WHAT IS FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY?

God does not philosophize.

Heidegger

The central theme of Heidegger's philosophy is the question concerning the meaning (*Sinn*) of being (*Sein*).¹ The "fundamental ontology" he advances in *Being and Time* departs dramatically from traditional ontology in that it asks not *what there is*, nor *why there is what there is*, nor even *why there is anything at all and not nothing*. The last of those questions, most famously associated with Leibniz and Schelling, is what Heidegger calls "the fundamental question of metaphysics."² It is a deep and important question, but it is not the question of fundamental ontology, for what it asks about is the totality of *entities*, not the meaning of *being*.

Heidegger's question, then, is not, Why is there anything? but rather, What does it *mean* for something to be? – or simply (redundantly), What *is* it to be? "What does 'being' mean?" Heidegger asks in his lectures of 1928. "This is quite simply the fundamental question of philosophy" (*MAL* 171).³ So, whereas traditional ontology was merely "ontic," in that it occupied itself exclusively with entities, or what is (*das Seiende*), Heidegger's own project is "ontological" in a radically new sense in

¹ I translate *Sein* as 'being' and *Seiende* as 'entity' or 'entities,' thus avoiding the common but confusing and unnecessary distinction between uppercase 'Being' and lowercase 'being.'

² Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, chapter 1.

³ Ernst Tudenghat objects that Heidegger conflates the question of the meaning of being with the question of the meaning of (the word) 'being' (see *SZ* 1, 11). Heidegger does admittedly use the two formulations interchangeably, but the distinction strikes me as irrelevant to his treatment of the question, since his argument has nothing to do with linguistic usage as such. For Heidegger's purposes, asking about the meaning of (the word) 'being' is simply another rhetorical way of asking what it means *to be*.

asking not just about what there is, but about being as such. Fundamental ontology is fundamental relative to traditional ontology, then, in the sense that it has to do with what any understanding of entities necessarily presupposes, namely, our understanding of that in virtue of which entities *are* entities. Heidegger's originality consists in part in having raised the question at all, perhaps more explicitly and systematically than ever before. Philosophy begins in wonder, Plato and Aristotle say,⁴ and in the course of his inquiry into the meaning of being, Heidegger can fairly be credited with reminding modern philosophy of what may be the most wondrous fact of all – that there *is* anything, and moreover that we understand something definite, however obscure, in understanding that there is.

Over and beyond having posed the question of being, though, Heidegger continues to command our attention because of the originality with which he approaches it, the philosophical strategy and the style of thought he thinks it demands, and finally the conclusions he draws in pursuing, if not exactly answering, the question. For the question of being, as Heidegger conceives it, is inseparable from questions concerning the understanding and the existence of those entities for which, or rather for whom, the question of being can be a question at all, namely, ourselves, human beings. The argument of *Being and Time* therefore begins by referring ontology back to what Heidegger calls an “existential analytic of Dasein,” that is, an account of the basic structures of human existence: “*fundamental ontology*, from which all others can first arise, must . . . be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*” (SZ 13), which offers a means of “uncovering the horizon for an interpretation of the meaning of being in general” (SZ 15). For Heidegger, “An analytic of Dasein must therefore remain the principal matter of concern in the question of being” (SZ 16).⁵

But how are we to understand such a project? What does the meaning of being have to do specifically with the existence of human beings? What unique link between being and human being requires that fundamental ontology proceed by means of an analytic of Dasein? Heidegger

⁴ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 155d. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A 2, 982b12.

⁵ But compare Heidegger's remark earlier in the text that “even the possibility of carrying out the analytic of Dasein depends on the prior working out of the question concerning the meaning of being in general” (SZ 13). Although an adequate answer to the question of being calls for an analytic of Dasein, that is, the analytic of Dasein in turn presupposes some initial articulation of the question of being itself. Heidegger's project is therefore inherently, but not viciously, circular.

tries to answer this question in the opening pages of *Being and Time*, but it is worth reminding ourselves of the strangeness of the very idea of fundamental ontology if we are to gain philosophical insight into Heidegger's enterprise. For while the question of being, with its echoes of ancient and medieval ontology, lies at the very heart of his thinking, early and late, Heidegger was no less preoccupied with philosophical questions concerning the conditions of intentionality and the ontological status of agency and subjectivity, uniquely modern problems that lend his work a degree of contemporary relevance unmatched by all but a few philosophical texts of the same period. What, then, is the connection between these two central motivating concerns in Heidegger's thought? Why should the renewal and explication of the question of being demand a critique of the concepts of subjectivity and intentionality? How does Heidegger propose to ground ontology as a whole in an account of the phenomenal structure of everyday experience, and why does he insist that "Ontology is possible only as phenomenology" (SZ 35)? Why, in short, does Heidegger pursue the question of being in the context of an "analytic of Dasein" at all?

The best short answer to these questions, I believe, lies in an unmistakable analogy between Heidegger's fundamental ontology in *Being and Time* and the "Copernican revolution" in philosophy Kant claimed to have brought about in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (KRV Bxvi). Heidegger offered lectures on Kant's philosophy throughout the 1920s and 1930s. He even published a book, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, in 1929, just two years after the publication of *Being and Time* itself, which I shall discuss further later in this chapter. In a word, Heidegger's existential "analytic" of Dasein is a self-conscious allusion to the Transcendental Analytic that makes up the central constructive core of the first *Critique*. The reference is crucially important, for an "analytic" in Kant's sense is not an analysis of the contents of our thoughts, but a kind of "dissection" (*Zergliederung*) – a "critique" in the original sense of the word – of the faculty of understanding (KRV A64–5/B89–90).⁶

⁶ Herman Philipse is therefore wrong to assimilate Heidegger's phenomenological interpretations in *Being and Time* to the sort of conceptual analysis practiced by J. L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle, and P. F. Strawson. See *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being*, 321, 341, 386. Heidegger's substantive positions do at times coincide with theirs, but his methods are crucially different. What Heidegger sets out to interpret is neither ordinary language nor the logic of our concepts, but the prelinguistic, preconceptual forms of understanding and interpretation that linguistic practices and conceptual categories presuppose. For a more detailed critique of Philipse, see my "On Making Sense (and Nonsense) of Heidegger."

Admittedly, the analogy is not perfect. For example, although fundamental ontology and the analytic of Dasein are distinct, they are apparently coextensive: Fundamental ontology must be sought in, and so must proceed *as*, an analytic of Dasein. The analytic of Dasein, then, unlike Kant's Transcendental Analytic, is not one discrete chapter in Heidegger's project but describes the enterprise as a whole. Certain aspects of Heidegger's analytic therefore have greater affinities with the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Transcendental Dialectic in the first *Critique* than with the Analytic proper. For example, Kant's critique of the *metaphysica specialis* of the Leibniz–Wolff tradition (which included rational psychology, cosmology, and theology) finds no close analogue in Heidegger's thought, apart from his constant insistence that Dasein cannot be understood in terms of the ontological categories of functional utility and objectivity. On the other hand, Kant's critique of the "logic of illusion" in the Dialectic can be seen as a distant ancestor of Heidegger's account of the perpetual "falling" (*Verfallen*),⁷ and the occasional motivated "flight" (*Flucht*) into inauthenticity, which tell us something essential about Dasein (SZ 184–6). Just as, for Kant, human reason is burdened with questions that it can neither dismiss nor answer, so too, for Heidegger, Dasein is in under constant, if at times only subtle, threat of diversion and temptation away from a proper "authentic" (*eigentlich*) understanding of itself. Notwithstanding the differences in detail, however, Heidegger's "project of a dismantling (*Destruktion*) of the history of ontology" (SZ 6)⁸ by means of an analytic of Dasein

⁷ 'Falling' is not a perfect translation of *Verfallen*, which literally means wasting, rotting, deterioration, decline, decay, addiction. Nevertheless, the bland English word does seem to capture the phenomenon Heidegger has in mind precisely because he repudiates those negative connotations: "The term expresses no negative evaluation," he insists (SZ 176). Indeed, falling is nothing like "a bad and deplorable ontic property, which could possibly be eliminated in more advanced stages of human culture" (SZ 176). Rather, "Falling reveals an essential ontological structure of Dasein itself, which, far from characterizing its nocturnal side, constitutes all its days in their everydayness" (SZ 179). "The term 'falling' . . . once again must not be taken as a value judgment, as if the term marked something like an occasionally occurring defect of Dasein's that is to be deplored and perhaps rectified in advanced stages of human culture" (PGZ 378).

⁸ In his 1927 lectures Heidegger also uses the term *Abbau* (GP 31), which Derrida renders as 'déconstruction.' Using Derrida's terminology to translate Heidegger's can be misleading, however, for whereas Derrida regards all intelligibility as self-undermining, and so essentially "undecidable," Heidegger is instead advocating a dismantling or building down of the distortions and obscurities of the metaphysical tradition in favor of a more coherent ontology rooted in Dasein's understanding of itself as being-in-the-world. Fundamental ontology thus in no way suggests, indeed it is profoundly averse to, the skeptical spirit of Derrida's deconstructive technique.

is an obvious tribute to Kant's effort to supplant Leibnizian-Wolffian "ontology" (*metaphysica generalis*) with the Aesthetic and the Analytic of the first *Critique*: "[T]he proud name of ontology," Kant writes, "must give way to the modest one of a mere analytic of the pure understanding" (*KRVA*247/B303).⁹

So, just as Kant is concerned not with the empirical contents of our beliefs, but with the subjective conditions of knowledge, Heidegger, I shall argue, is interested not in our particular practices and understandings, but in the conditions of the possibility of interpretation (*Auslegung*). Interpretation, for Heidegger, means explicit understanding, making sense of something *as* something – primitively *entities as entities*, that is, as *being*. According to Heidegger, then, the question of the meaning of being, the question concerning what we understand when we understand entities *as entities*, presupposes some general account of our ability to understand anything explicitly as anything. So, while Henry Allison has construed Kant's transcendental idealism as an account of "epistemic conditions," or conditions of knowledge,¹⁰ I read Heidegger's fundamental ontology as an account of what I shall call *hermeneutic conditions*, that is, conditions of interpretation or explicit understanding. The notion of hermeneutic conditions implicit in *Being and Time* is important especially because traditional philosophy, and in particular modern theories of knowledge and intentionality, have so consistently taken for granted the possibility of interpretation by appeal to such things as subjects and subjectivity, consciousness, ideas, representations, semantic content, and the "aspectual shape" of intentional states.¹¹

But how is anything like subjectivity, representation, consciousness, content, or even *aspect* intelligible to us *as such*? This is the question Heidegger intends his fundamental ontology to address. And just as Kant's critique of reason could claim to undercut the "way of ideas" of early modern epistemology, turning its attention instead to the conditions of anything, even an idea or representation, counting as an object of knowledge, so too Heidegger's phenomenology of everydayness challenges traditional assumptions about the mind, mental representation, and intentionality in favor of an inquiry into the conditions of anything

⁹ For an account of Kant's own changing conception of transcendental philosophy and its relation to metaphysics, see Eckart Förster, "Kant's Notion of Philosophy."

¹⁰ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, and "Transcendental Idealism: A Retrospective," in *Idealism and Freedom: Essays on Kant's Theoretical and Practical Philosophy*.

¹¹ The phrase is John Searle's. See *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, 155.

making sense to us *as* anything. What follows in this chapter, then, is a sketch of the interpretation of fundamental ontology that will inform the rest of the book, namely, as an account of the conditions of our having an explicit understanding of being, that is, an interpretation of entities *as* entities.

The Meaning of Being

Heidegger's invocation of the notion of being is often dismissed by critics who regard it as a conflation of three different senses of the verb 'to be': existence, predication, and identity.¹² Heidegger usually seems to have existence in mind, though several sections of *Being and Time* are concerned explicitly with the nature and conditions of predication (SZ §§§31–3).¹³

Does Heidegger's entire enterprise rest on a grammatical confusion? One reason to think not is that there is no reason to deny that being comprises all three semantic contexts. After all, what it means for something to be *such-and-such*, or to be *identical with* or *distinct from* something else is no less intelligible to us in everyday life, yet enigmatic upon reflection, than what it means for something to *exist*. That there are three distinct logical senses of the verb 'to be,' and so perhaps three distinct dimensions of our understanding of being, is no reason not to ask *what* it is we understand in each case. The question of being is in this way perfectly general and so in principle neutral about whether there is one sense or several. In any case, Heidegger does not assume that there is just one meaning. Indeed, one of the central tenets of *Being and Time* is precisely that being, in whichever grammatical form, means something fundamentally different for different kinds of entities – *Existenz* or "being-in-the-world" (*In-der-Welt-sein*) for human beings, "availability" (*Zuhandenheit*) for things defined by their use, and "occurrentness" (*Vorhandenheit*) for objects, properties, and relations. The only unity Heidegger claims for the meaning of being has to do with its general intelligibility in terms of some temporal framework, or "horizon." Time, Heidegger proposes, constitutes "the transcendental horizon for

¹² Concerning the various senses of 'to be,' see Plato's *Sophist* and (more recently) Rudolf Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language," 73–4. Carnap insisted that Heidegger's question is a mere grammatical conundrum. See my "On Making Sense (and Nonsense) of Heidegger."

¹³ Heidegger devoted an essay to "The Principle of Identity" in 1957, in *Identity and Difference*, but the subject hardly arises at all in his early thought.

the question of being" (SZ Part One)¹⁴; indeed, it is "the horizon for any understanding of being at all" (SZ 1).

But this response to the standard objection may be too easy, for the point of the objection is that Heidegger's question is not one question at all, but three, each of which would best be served by its own separate line of inquiry. Ernst Tugendhat has responded to the standard criticism in another way by arguing that the universality of the question of being, for Heidegger and the ancients alike, stems not from any assumption about the unified sense of the verb 'to be,' but instead from the universal phenomenon of *affirmation*. Affirmation is implicit in utterances and so ordinarily goes unexpressed, yet both affirmation and negation apply universally to speech acts of all kinds, not just to assertions and not just to sentences containing the verb 'to be.' The word 'is' can serve a variety of different linguistic functions, but optatives, imperatives, and indicatives all contain affirmations and negations, if only tacitly. And as Tugendhat points out, "It has never been doubted that the word 'not,' for its part, has a unified meaning."¹⁵

Tugendhat's proposal has several compelling points to recommend it, but I think it is misleading as an approach to the question of being. Tugendhat is right to suggest that Heidegger's question has to do with the primitive structures of understanding, and his analysis of the question of being in terms of the affirmability and negatability of linguistic expressions contextualizes the global scope of ontology in "a dimension of *praxis*," which is of course crucial to Heidegger's conception of being-in-the-world.¹⁶

The problem with Tugendhat's account is that it confines intelligibility and practice to an exclusively linguistic context. For example, Tugendhat simply folds the pragmatic notions of acceptance and refusal, or assent and dissent, into the specifically semantic concepts of affirmation and negation, assertion and denial. But, of course, we can reject what someone says by uttering affirmative statements, just as we can embrace what they say using negations. Tugendhat's "linguistic-analytical" reconstruction of the question of being therefore tends to

¹⁴ The first two-thirds of Part One of *Being and Time* constitute the two divisions of the published book. See §8, "The Design of the Treatise."

¹⁵ Tugendhat, "Die sprachanalytische Kritik der Ontologie," 492. See also lectures 8–10 in *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination*, where Tugendhat candidly admits that his analysis "certainly does not correspond exactly to Heidegger's self-understanding, but it is the best I could make of Heidegger's question of being" (150).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 492.

suppress the distinction between pragmatic and linguistic intelligibility on which, as we shall see, Heidegger insists. For Heidegger, by contrast, being is not restricted to the intelligibility we can explicitly affirm or deny in linguistic utterances; it is more fundamentally the intelligibility in virtue of which we treat things as the things they are – as human beings, as environments or practical artifacts, or as mere objects, properties, or relations. Not all practice is linguistic practice, nor does treating things appropriately necessarily involve affirming or denying anything about them.¹⁷

But although his interpretation fails to capture something essential in Heidegger's question of being, Tugendhat's account does nonetheless express something true and important about the question and its relation to the analytic of Dasein and the critique of intentionality. Tugendhat is wrong to confine Heidegger's notions of intelligibility and practice to linguistic meaning and linguistic practice, but he is right to construe being as intelligibility and to identify human practice as its proper domain.

What, then, is Heidegger asking about when he asks about the meaning of being? The closest thing to a definition of being in *Being and Time* is Heidegger's gloss of it as "that which defines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities . . . are in each case already understood" (SZ 6). Being is the intelligibility, or more precisely the condition of the intelligibility, of entities as entities. Furthermore, that intelligibility has two aspects: "[E]very entity can, as an entity, be examined in a twofold question: what it is and whether it is" (GP 123). Heidegger's notions of "whatness" (*Washeit*) or "being such-and-so" (*Sosein*) and "thatness" (*Daß-sein*) echo the scholastic distinction between *essentia* and *existentia*, but Heidegger rejects those terms as inadequate for an inquiry into the being of human beings, whose whatness or essence cannot be understood apart from the thatness or fact of their existence (SZ 42).¹⁸ Heidegger therefore abandons the traditional vocabulary and instead

¹⁷ I will argue in Chapter 6 that "discourse" (*Rede*) is not language or linguistic practice, but the expressive-communicative dimension of practical understanding at large, which conditions interpretation. All language is discourse, then, but not all discourse is language.

¹⁸ This is also why in the "Letter on 'Humanism'" Heidegger rejects Sartre's formula that, for human beings, "existence precedes essence." Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, 17 passim. According to Heidegger, Sartre "takes *existentia* and *essentia* in the sense of metaphysics, which since Plato has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this proposition. But the reversal of a metaphysical proposition remains a metaphysical proposition." *Wegmarken* 159.

rests the analytic of Dasein on a distinction between the general "existential" (ontological) structures of human existence, on the one hand, and the particular "who" (SZ 113–30) of Dasein in its various "existentiel" (ontic) modes, on the other (SZ 12).¹⁹

One further point is worth noting. Heidegger might seem to be drawing a distinction between being and the meaning (*Sinn*) of being when he analyzes all inquiry, and so too his own question, into three constitutive elements, namely, what the inquiry asks about (*das Gefragte*), what it directly questions or investigates (*das Befragte*), and finally, what it tries to find out or ascertain (*das Erfragte*) (SZ 5). The question of being, Heidegger says, asks about being by directly questioning entities, particularly Dasein, in order to ascertain the meaning of being. Does this schematic sketch of the inquiry and its formal distinction between being and the meaning of being entail any substantive or systematic distinction between them?²⁰

I think not, and to see why not, consider by way of analogy asking about a foreign or ancient word by addressing or "interrogating" a text in order to ascertain the word's meaning. One can distinguish the word from its meaning in this merely formal and provisional way without denying that the meaning is, after all, constitutive of the word, that the meaning is what makes the word the word it is, and that to understand the word is in effect to understand its meaning. So too, for Heidegger, being is constituted by the meaning of being, so that an understanding of being is in effect the same as an understanding of its meaning. As he says later in *Being and Time*, meaning is not an entity at all over and beyond that of which it is the meaning; therefore, grasping the meaning of anything simply consists in understanding the thing itself: "[S]trictly speaking, what is understood is not the meaning, but the entity" (SZ 151). The meaning of being is likewise nothing distinct from or additional to being itself; to understand being is simply to grasp its meaning. Hence, "when we ask about the meaning of being, the inquiry neither becomes deep nor broods on anything that stands behind being, but rather asks about being itself insofar as it enters into the

¹⁹ Heidegger's account of Dasein's "whoness" (*Werheit*) (GP 108–71) is a deliberate departure from the traditional metaphysical assumption that all entities are defined in terms of their *essentia*, nature, or whatness.

²⁰ Mark Okrent and William Blattner argue for versions of such a distinction. See Okrent's *Heidegger's Pragmatism: Understanding, Being, and the Critique of Metaphysics*, 225, and his essay "The Truth of Being and the History of Philosophy." See Blattner's *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*, 5–6. I think the distinction Heidegger draws is merely formal.

intelligibility of Dasein" (SZ 152). Moreover, when Heidegger later defines meaning (*Sinn*), what he says is virtually identical with what he says about being. Being is "that which defines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities . . . are in each case already understood" (SZ 6). And what is meaning? "Meaning is the whereupon of projection . . . in terms of which something becomes intelligible as something" (SZ 151). The two notions thus play essentially the same functional role in Heidegger's thought, notwithstanding the formal distinction one can in principle draw between what one is asking about and what more specifically one wants to know.

The question of being is thus equivalent to the question concerning the meaning of being, and the question What does it mean to be? is in turn equivalent to the question What do we understand when we understand what and that (or whether) something is? The question concerning the meaning of being therefore reduces to the question concerning our understanding of being. Indeed, for Heidegger, "there is" no being apart from or independent of our understanding of it:

being "is" only in the understanding of the entity to whose being something like an understanding of being belongs. Being can therefore remain unconceptualized, but it is never not understood at all. . . . [There is a] necessary connection between being and understanding. (SZ 183)²¹

In short, "only as long as Dasein *is* . . . 'is there' (*gibt es*) being" (SZ 212).²² As Heidegger repeatedly insists, this is not to say that entities in general exist only if and when human beings exist; indeed, Heidegger is what in Chapter 4 I shall call an *ontic realist*, that is, a realist with regard to physical nature. The point is rather that being – that is, the intelligibility of entities, their making sense *as* entities – depends on human beings, whose own being, Heidegger maintains, consists essentially in having an understanding of being. Being, then, is always and only being of which Dasein has an understanding: "'There is' (*gibt es*) being only in the specific disclosedness that characterizes the understanding of being. . . . There is being only . . . if Dasein exists" (GP 24–5). For

²¹ Heidegger uses inverted commas or reverts to the locution "*es gibt*" (there is), whenever he says that being "is," since being is not an entity and so cannot strictly speaking "be."

²² Interestingly, Heidegger says exactly the same things about truth: "Dasein, as constituted by disclosedness, is essentially in the truth. 'There is' truth only insofar and as long as Dasein is. Entities are only uncovered *when*, and only disclosed *as long as*, Dasein itself *is*. Newton's laws, the principle of noncontradiction, all truths in general are only true as long as Dasein *is*" (SZ 226). See Chapter 4.

Heidegger, the relation between being and our understanding of being is internal, not external, so the two are strictly correlative. One cannot "be" without the other.²³

Fundamental ontology therefore deals explicitly with human understanding, existence, and intentionality in a way that traditional ontology could not, just as traditional theories of understanding and intentionality have failed to come to terms with the ontological presuppositions lurking at their own foundations. To sustain an interpretation of the analytic of Dasein as an account of hermeneutic conditions, however, requires spelling out more precisely what Heidegger takes those conditions to be and exactly what it is they are supposed to condition. In short, what is the analytic of Dasein an analytic *of*, and what phenomenon is it in the service of rendering intelligible?

Understanding and the As-Structure of Interpretation

In his Marburg lectures of 1927, immediately following the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger says, "Our aim is to clarify fundamentally the possibility of the understanding of being in general" (GP 397), to "inquire into the condition of the possibility of the understanding of being as such" (GP 399). Heidegger's conclusion is that "temporality must be the condition of the possibility of the understanding of being" (GP 397). Indeed, the conclusion of *Being and Time*, if there is one, and again the justification of its title, is that we understand being in terms of time.

What then is understanding? As Heidegger uses the term (usually *Verstehen*, sometimes *Verständnis*), understanding is nothing necessarily

²³ Frederick Olafson is therefore not altogether wrong in *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind* when he says that Heidegger's notion of being "would not rule out the possibility that there could be entities without being" (136). In one sense, of course, it is plainly contradictory to suppose that there could *be* entities without *being*, just as it is contradictory to suppose that a person could walk without walking. But being is not an entity, neither a property nor an event like walking, so the analogy fails. To say that there could be entities without being is simply to say that there could be entities in the absence of any understanding of being, hence any understanding of entities *as* entities, in which case there would be no answer to the question What does it *mean* to be? or How is the being of anything to be *understood*? This last formulation especially reveals the essential normativity of the question of being. Olafson unfortunately lapses into talking about being as if it were a kind of entity, thus blurring the ontological difference, when he refers to what he imagines must be its "unity and singularity" (137; cf. 70–4). Only entities can be unitary and singular or binary and plural. I discuss this further in Chapter 4.

cognitive, but rather the entire scope of our ability to make sense of things by availing ourselves of them competently, even if unreflectively, in practice. Understanding means competence, skill, know-how: "In speaking ontically we sometimes use the expression 'to understand something' in the sense of 'managing' (*vorstehen*) an affair,' 'being up to it,' 'being able to'" (SZ 143). Whereas traditional epistemology assumes that human understanding essentially amounts to cognition, the theoretical grasp of propositions, Heidegger construes it instead as practical ability. Heidegger therefore rejects traditional conceptions of understanding in favor of the more familiar common notion drawn from ordinary language:

understanding oneself in the being of one's ownmost ability to be (Seinkönnen) is the primordial existential concept of understanding. Its terminological meaning goes back to common linguistic usage, when we say: someone can manage a thing (einer Sache vorstehen), i.e. he has an understanding of it (versteht sich darauf). (GP 391–2)

Simply put, understanding consists in knowing *how*, not knowing *that*.²⁴ More specifically, understanding means *getting it*, where the "it" in question can be anything from a bodily technique to an esoteric joke.

²⁴ Gilbert Ryle wrote a rather uneven review of *Being and Time* for the journal *Mind* in 1929, and then some twenty years later, in chapter 2 of *The Concept of Mind*, wound up drawing much this same distinction between intelligent practical skill and theoretical cognition. In his review, ironically, he complains that in Heidegger's account "knowledge of some reality . . . is surreptitiously imported . . . into such terms as 'understanding,'" for the language of *Being and Time* "surely implies that *underlying* our other reactions and attitudes there is *knowledge*." Consequently, he argues, "the attempt to derive our knowledge of 'things' from our practical attitude towards tools breaks down; for to use a tool involves knowledge of what it is, what can be done with it, and what wants doing" (369). It is unclear if Ryle is here contradicting his own later account, which insists on the irreducibility of knowing-how to knowing-that, or if he means 'knowledge' in a distinct practical sense. If the latter, then he is not disagreeing with Heidegger. For what they both deplore is precisely what Ryle calls the "intellectualist legend," according to which intelligent, skillful practices are supposed to be explained by our theoretical grasp of propositions. On the contrary, knowing how to do something lies in the ability to do it. Some critics have objected that agents might still be said to know how to do something even after they have lost the ability to do it, for example musicians who meet with debilitating injuries. But in that case, the knowledge in question is still arguably bound up analytically with the ability that the agents had and then lost. Finally, of course, some uses of the expression 'know how' do not refer to practical skill at all, for example when I say that I know how a machine works or how someone does something. In cases of this sort, what I know is *that*, say, the spring pushes the lever or *that* she disengages the clutch with her left foot. I can therefore consistently know *how to do* things practically without knowing theoretically *how I do them*.

The concept forms the very linchpin of the project of fundamental ontology, naming as it does the most basic connection between the meaning of being and the human beings whose being consists in their understanding of it.

'Understanding,' then, is a success verb inasmuch as it presupposes the meaningfulness of the thing understood: You can't understand something that doesn't make any sense. Still, notwithstanding the implication of success, it is important to recognize that understanding is itself nonetheless an intentional notion. I shall discuss the structure of understanding in more detail later, but suffice it here to say that it involves the purposive use of available (*zuhanden*) things in practical situations. The notion of use does not by itself satisfy one traditional criterion of intentionality, since the things we use cannot fail to figure somehow into our use of them: If the thing is not there, you're not using it. The possible nonexistence of things is inadequate as a criterion of intentionality, however, since by that standard, seeing would also fail to count as intentional: If it's not there, after all, you're not *seeing* it. In any case, even if the mere use of things is not by itself intentional, the practical understanding with which we use them is, for we often find ourselves in situations and take up projects that turn out to be radically different from what we had understood them to be. By referring cognitive attitudes back to the practical context of everyday understanding, then, Heidegger is emphatically not proposing a behavioristic reduction of intentionality to anything nonintentional.

Yet in spite of the ontological primacy and systematic prominence of understanding in *Being and Time*, I want to suggest that methodologically the concept plays a secondary role to Heidegger's notion of interpretation (*Auslegung*). Understanding is the more primordial phenomenon, yet it is interpretation that figures as the guiding thread in the analytic of Dasein taken as a whole. What Heidegger is trying to account for is not just our capacity to understand entities in their being, but more precisely our capacity to understand things explicitly, as such, *as being*. Interpretation is understanding made explicit. What we understand explicitly in interpretation, Heidegger says, "has the structure of *something as something*. . . . The 'as' makes up the structure of the explicitness of something understood; it constitutes interpretation" (SZ 149). Interpretation is thus a 'development' or 'cultivation' (*Ausbildung*) of understanding (SZ 148), "the working-out (*Ausarbeiten*) and appropriation (*Zueignen*) of an understanding" (SZ 231).

Interpretation therefore presupposes understanding, not vice versa: “[I]nterpretation is grounded existentially in understanding, nor does the latter arise from the former” (SZ 148). Understanding is the more primordial phenomenon, yet it is interpretation – that is, the fact that we (at least sometimes) understand things explicitly or as such – that figures as a premise in the analytic of Dasein. For recall that being consists in the condition of the intelligibility of entities as entities: It is “that which defines entities as entities” (SZ 6). Interpretation is constituted by the *as*-structure, which is, I want to suggest, the deep central concern of Heidegger’s argument in *Being and Time*. What we understand explicitly in interpretation, he says, “has the structure of something as something. . . . The ‘as’ makes up the structure of the explicitness of something understood; it constitutes interpretation” (SZ 149).

But interpretation is not an element in all our comportment and all our dealings with things and with each other.²⁵ Dasein is ordinarily far from understanding itself or its being in explicit, perspicuous, or even fully coherent terms. Nonetheless, since a positive understanding of being is constitutive of the very being of Dasein, Heidegger insists that our understanding is always, at least in part, thematic:

it belongs to the constitution of the being (*Seinsverfassung*) of Dasein that in its being it has a relation of being (*Seinsverhältnis*) to that being. And this in turn means that Dasein understands itself in its being in some particular way and to some extent explicitly (*in irgendeiner Weise und Ausdrücklichkeit*). (SZ 12)

Moreover, “it belongs to its ownmost being to have an understanding of that being and to comport itself in each case as already interpreted in some particular way in its being” (SZ 15).²⁶ So, although *most* of

²⁵ It has to be, according to those who construe the understanding–interpretation distinction as a distinction between the ontological structure of significance, on the one hand, which is something like an abiding capacity, and its ontic actualization, on the other, that is, some particular exercise of that capacity. Since our understanding of being always has some particular ontic manifestation in our actual encounter with and treatment of entities, reading the text in this way implies that interpretation is a more or less constantly ongoing phenomenon. See Richardson, *Existential Epistemology*, 30; Okrent, *Heidegger’s Pragmatism*, 55.

²⁶ “As in each case already interpreted in some particular way in its being” translates *je schon in einer gewissen Ausgelegtheit seines Seins*. The Macquarrie and Robinson translation misleadingly inserts the subjunctive “already . . . in each case *as if* its Being has been interpreted in some manner” (emphasis added), which casts unwarranted doubt on whether Dasein has in fact been interpreted or just seems to have been. The abiding

our understanding is tacit and unthematic, we are never entirely without *some* explicit interpretation of ourselves and the world. Indeed, Heidegger refers to "the specific disclosive function of interpretation" (SZ 150), which suggests that interpretation plays more than just a contingent or epiphenomenal role in Dasein's disclosedness at large. For example, interpretations frequently sink back down into the prethematic context of intelligibility, essentially transforming it by leaving traces or deposits of an understanding that was once explicit. The totality of involvements situating available equipment (*Zeug*), for instance, "need not be grasped explicitly by any thematic interpretation. Even if it has undergone such an interpretation, it recedes again into an unobtrusive understanding" (SZ 150). Heidegger does not rule out the possibility that the totality of involvements might remain entirely unaltered by its being made explicit in interpretation, but the idea that our background understanding might remain entirely untouched hermeneutically in this way seems unlikely. Just as most of an iceberg remains submerged, but only because a portion of it rises above the surface, so too, although our understanding of being remains largely hidden from view and beyond our immediate interpretive grasp, its very inconspicuousness may well be owing in part to the fact that we do sometimes interpret things concretely and explicitly in some particular way.

Finally, the phenomenon of interpretation is crucial for Heidegger's purposes since in its absence there would be no criteria identifying an understanding of being as an understanding of being at all. Understanding is itself defined by criteria provided by its own explicitness in interpretation. This is what I take Heidegger to mean when he says that in interpretation "understanding does not become something different, it becomes itself" (SZ 148). Interpretation is no mere contingent or inessential modification of understanding; it is rather the explicit realization or manifestation of the content and substance of understanding itself. Interpretation therefore serves Heidegger's argument in *Being and Time* precisely because it makes explicit the intelligibility essential to our ordinary understanding of being at large. We understand entities as entities, as such, as *being*. Interpretation therefore marks the point of departure for fundamental ontology as a whole, and the dawning of the question of the meaning of being is its exemplary instance.

presence and effects of prior interpretations in our everyday understanding of being are of central importance to Heidegger's conceptions of discourse and authenticity.

The Analytic of Dasein as an Account of Hermeneutic Conditions

I read Division I of *Being and Time*, then, as an account of *hermeneutic conditions*, which is to say conditions of interpretation, conditions of our understanding something *as* something. Foremost among hermeneutic conditions, of course, is the phenomenon of understanding itself, in particular our understanding of being. Heidegger's conception of understanding as practical competence, that is, informs his account of the availability of the things we use in our everyday practices, the anonymous social norms that govern those practices – what he calls “the one” (*das Man*) – and finally the temporal structure of existence itself: our “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*) into a world with an already defined past and our “projection” (*Entwurf*) into the possibilities or options that give shape to our future. The constitutive structures of human being figure in the argument of *Being and Time*, then, as conditions of the sort of explicit understanding manifest in its primitive form in the question of the meaning of being. What I am calling hermeneutic conditions are, in short, what Heidegger calls “existentials” (*Existentialie*).

My notion of hermeneutic conditions is based, albeit loosely, on the concept of epistemic conditions, which Henry Allison invokes in his interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism.²⁷ Epistemic conditions are, as the terms implies, conditions of our knowledge of objects and states of affairs such as space and time, and categories such as substance and causality. In their specific reference to our knowledge as finite beings, Allison suggests, epistemic conditions differ from the logical conditions of thought, from the causal conditions of thinking taken as a psychological or physiological process, and finally from ontological conditions, which is to say the way things are “in themselves,” independent of the conditions of our knowing them. Heideggerian hermeneutic conditions are like Kantian epistemic conditions in the first two respects but not in the third, since the point of fundamental ontology is precisely to deny any sense of ontological commitment independent of an account of our own everyday, preontological understanding of being. So, although the analytic of Dasein is “transcendental” inasmuch as it inquires into the conditions of interpretation in general, it does not pretend to any sort of ontological neutrality. Indeed, for Heidegger,

²⁷ Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, 10–13, 334 n20. The two cases differ widely, of course, but I think the analogy sheds some light on the sources and intentions of Heidegger's early project. I am not assuming that Allison would endorse the comparison, nor do I think the success of my own argument depends on the success of his.

"Every disclosure of being as the *transcendens*" – including fundamental ontology itself, of course – "is transcendental knowledge" (SZ 38).

First, then, consider what hermeneutic conditions have in common with epistemic conditions as Allison conceives them. To begin with, hermeneutic conditions must themselves *be* epistemic conditions, for knowledge is itself a form of interpretation, and conditions of interpretation are a fortiori conditions of knowledge. Knowledge and cognition, indeed propositional attitudes in general, presuppose interpretation, since it is only by understanding something *as* something that we are ever in a position to attribute properties to particulars and hold claims to be true or false of them in the first place. The converse, however, does not hold: Conditions specific to knowledge are not necessarily conditions of interpretation generally. What is necessary for propositional thought might not be necessary for having an understanding of things being, and being such and such. The conditions of *knowing that* are not identical with the conditions of *knowing how*, then, since the latter include the former but not vice versa.

This is not to say that Heidegger's position simply subsumes Kant's on all points, for Kant's account of epistemic conditions is itself rooted in an ontology whose basic assumptions Heidegger rejects. In his 1928 lectures, for example, he maintains that the objective and naturalistic orientation of epistemology has blinded modern philosophers to the salient features of the phenomena they themselves set out to describe and explain:

it is characteristic of Kant, no less than his successors, and especially the present-day epigones, to inquire all too hastily into the ground of the possibility of the relation of consciousness to the object, without first of all adequately clarifying what is meant by this relation whose possibility is to be explained, between what this relation obtains, and what sort of being applies to it. (MAL 163)

Kant's successors and "present-day epigones," of course, include Brentano and Husserl:

The theory of knowledge in the second half of the nineteenth century and in recent decades has repeatedly made the subject-object relation the basis of its inquiries, yet idealistic as well as realistic attempts at an explanation had to fail since what was to be explained was never adequately defined. (MAL 163–4)

Heidegger's account of hermeneutic conditions therefore not only claims priority over the Kantian account of epistemic conditions, it

also challenges the presuppositions underlying Kant's conception of knowledge as a relation between a subject and an object. By inquiring into the conditions not of knowledge but of Dasein's explicit understanding of being, fundamental ontology moves beyond the orbit of both epistemology and traditional transcendental philosophy: "The transcendence of Dasein is the central problem – with a view to clarifying not just 'knowledge' (*Erkenntnis*), but Dasein and its existence as such" (*MAL* 170). But again, since knowledge itself is a form of interpretation, any genuine account of the conditions of the former presupposes an account of the conditions of the latter.

Second, like Kantian epistemic conditions, Heideggerian hermeneutic conditions are not the causal conditions of interpretation, understood as a psychological, physiological, or even social process. Of course, Heidegger does not deny that there are causal conditions of interpretation, but these are the concern of the empirical sciences, not of fundamental ontology. For Heidegger, as for Husserl, phenomenology concerns itself with conditions specific to understanding and – human – intentionality as such, not with what brings them about or causes them to persist. This is why, notwithstanding Heidegger's aversion to the doctrines and methods of orthodox phenomenology, he enthusiastically endorsed Husserl's critique of psychologism in *Logical Investigations*. Logic, indeed all intentional content per se, Husserl argued, is irreducibly normative. It is not just an empirical fact about the cognitive activity of human beings, for example, that when we add 2 and 2, we get 4. Rather, it is a rule of mathematical calculation that the addition of 2 and 2 *ought* to yield 4. Moreover, the laws of mathematics are exact and knowable with certainty a priori, whereas all knowledge in empirical psychology is inexact, inductive, and merely probable. Likewise, the contents of our thoughts generally are normative inasmuch as they are governed by logical norms of reasoning and epistemic norms of evidence. The intentional contents of our mental states are not just brute factual occurrences; rather, they impose complex normative constraints on one another, and it is precisely in virtue of those constraints that they manage to refer to objects and states of affairs beyond themselves at all. No purely nonnormative empirical description of thought understood as a causal process can capture what is essential to it qua intentional.

So, for example, in the same spirit, in his 1928 lectures Heidegger criticizes Leibniz for attempting "to justify a general norm for thought by appeal to facts of experience," attempting, that is, "to justify empirically an a priori proposition. Husserl's critique of psychologism,

Logical Investigations, Vol. 1, demonstrates the absurdity of such an attempted justification." Heidegger adds, however, that Husserl's "argument is of course only relatively compelling and merely negative. For the question remains, what in general are a priori propositions, and is a normative proposition then an a priori proposition, and in what sense?" (*MAL* 151). Husserl's critique rules out any reduction of the normative to the nonnormative, that is, but it does not tell us whether the norms constituting intentional content must have a basis in a priori knowledge, and if so, what the a priori itself amounts to.

The distinction between causal and hermeneutic conditions remains essential to Heidegger's fundamental ontology – for example, the distinction between availability and occurrentness as categories definitive of nonhuman entities. For that distinction is no mere logical distinction between concepts we use in our fully conceptualized thoughts about equipment and objects, nor is it merely a reminder of the relatively uninteresting empirical fact that we make unreflective use of things before ever acquiring full-blown propositional knowledge about them. The distinction is instead part of Heidegger's account of hermeneutic conditions, the point of which is neither logical nor psychological, strictly speaking. The point of the distinction is rather that our unreflective use of things constitutes a form of understanding whose normative structure always already conditions and informs the norms governing the way we talk and think about objects and states of affairs. The hermeneutic conditions inherent in practical understanding are not merely causal conditions and so cannot be captured in any nonnormative description of mere behavior or mentality.

Can this distinction between causal and hermeneutic conditions be drawn more precisely? What is essential to hermeneutic conditions, I want to suggest, is that they are constitutive of what they condition in a way that causal conditions are not. That is, whereas causal conditions bring it about that one as a matter of fact has some interpretive understanding of something as something, hermeneutic conditions constitute what it is for something to fall under an aspect, and thus to be interpretable, at all. For a condition to be constitutive of what it conditions, it is not enough that it merely bring the thing about. It must also figure into an adequate understanding of the conditioned phenomenon as the thing it is. For hermeneutic conditions to be constitutive of the interpretability of entities, then, any explicit understanding of those entities as the entities they are must also involve some understanding, however unthematic, of the hermeneutic conditions that render them

intelligible. So, although we can remain perfectly oblivious of the causal conditions bringing about or sustaining our understanding of things, we must have at least some prephilosophical inkling, however primitive and inarticulate, of the hermeneutic conditions that constitute their ordinary intelligibility for us.

So, for example, Heidegger identifies temporality as the most fundamental of all hermeneutic conditions, since understanding useful things and objects presupposes an understanding of such things as things we encounter in the present, while understanding human beings presupposes an understanding of them as interpreting themselves in light of their past and with an eye to their future. Without such tacit temporal frameworks of interpretation already in place, those entities would not be intelligible to us as they are. So too, the practical availability of useful things is a hermeneutic condition, since our understanding of anything as anything presupposes some mastery of the ways in which that understanding is put into practice in normal circumstances. Heidegger's distinction between availability and occurrentness, then, is not concerned with the psychological or social histories of our acquisition of skills and knowledge; rather, it specifies what is involved in or what it means to understand objects *as* objects, useful things *as* useful, useless things *as* useless, and human beings *as* human. Purposive activity, responsiveness to social norms, moods, and expressive and communicative competence are likewise hermeneutic conditions, since being able to interpret human beings in their average everydayness presupposes an understanding of them as practically situated, attuned social agents whose self-interpretations are manifest in their discursive interactions with one another.

Construing mundane practical phenomena of this sort as constitutive conditions of the interpretability of entities as such, then, is something essentially different from specifying the *de facto* causal conditions in the absence of which interpretation could or would not occur. Causal conditions are what bring it about that interpretation in fact happens. Hermeneutic conditions, by contrast, are what constitute a thing's being intelligible at all as potentially accessible to our interpretative practices, *as* the thing it is.

Finally, like epistemic conditions, hermeneutic conditions are not mere logical conditions of thought, independent of the way things are in fact given to us to understand. Consequently, the central claims of the analytic of Dasein are in no way meant to approach merely analytic or conceptual truths. Heidegger's analytic is no more "analytic" in that